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ABSTRACT

During the past 20 years, alternative professional preparation and certification programs have expanded within the field of physical education. Societal trends, the media, and demographics have dictated these changes. This digest examines factors leading to an increase in the scope of career opportunities for physical education professionals and looks at future trends, including a move back toward traditional teaching positions. With the advancement of technological resources and time-saving devices, available time for leisure and recreation has increased, resulting in the creation of additional career opportunities for exercise and sport professionals, exercise specialists, corporate fitness directors, wellness consultants and coordinators, and specialists who could put theory into practice. Along with college and university-based professional preparation programs, many professional organizations now provide exercise and sport credentialing opportunities and examples of such organizations are included. Some current trends that may impact on the career paths of physical education professionals include aging of the population, more at-risk children in the school system, and increased use of computers. (LL)

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ERIC DIGEST

ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

FITNESS AND EXERCISE

by

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON TEACHER EDUCATION

Alternative Career Paths in Physical Education: Fitness and Exercise

Janet L. Zak
Patricia Sullivan

Introduction

During the past 20 years, alternative professional preparation and certification programs have expanded within the field of physical education. Societal trends, the media, and demographics have dictated these changes. For example, a decline in the number of students attending grades K-12 has decreased the need for physical education teachers (Freeman, 1987). Fewer school systems today require physical education (Newell, 1990), yet Americans are increasingly interested in maintaining health and fitness into adulthood. Even the term "physical education," has gone through a transformation. Newell (1990) identified almost 70 different academic department labels in the area of physical education, including exercise and sport sciences, kinesiology, health promotion and human performance, and sport fitness and leisure studies. This Digest will examine the factors which led to an increase in the scope of career opportunities for physical education professionals and look at future trends, including a move back toward traditional teaching positions.

Development of Career Paths

Prior to the 1970s, physical education professionals were primarily channelled into the traditional roles of physical education teacher and/or coach. In 1970, Kenneth H. Cooper introduced *The Aerobics Way* to the general public, addressing the benefits of exercise as a lifetime activity. Jackie Sorenson (aerobic dance) and Jim Fixx (running) were also physical activity pioneers in the early 1970s and helped to further that idea. Within the next few years, jobs began to emerge in health clubs and corporate fitness facilities (Jacoby, 1990).

With the advancement of technological resources and time-saving devices, available time for leisure and recreation increased from an average of 34 hours per week in 1965 to an average of 41 hours per week for males and 40 for females in 1985 (Cutler, 1990). Facilities opened that gave the public a means and place to recreate.

Organizations such as the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sport helped encourage the American population to spend leisure time pursuing lifetime physical fitness. Corporations and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) discovered the link between fitness and health, and employer-sponsored facilities began to proliferate (Seefeldt & Vogel, 1986). Hospitals began to conduct wellness programs.

This growth of fitness facilities and programs resulted in additional jobs for exercise and sport professionals as exercise specialists, corporate fitness directors, wellness consultants, and coordinators (Jacoby, 1990; Nieman, 1990). A need for additional physical education professionals in these alternative career areas was created.

The media also had a profound influence on the broadening of physical education career opportunities. With the advent of satellite capabilities and the increase in cable television stations such as Home Team Sports, ESPN, and local cable networks, the media has become a major factor in shaping and molding America's increased acceptance of exercise and physical activity (Spears, Swanson, & Smith, 1978). The media has given the public an entirely new perspective on exercise and physical activity in terms of acceptability and job possibilities.

Emergence of Professional Preparation and Certification Programs

As job opportunities expanded, knowledge increased, and equipment became more sophisticated, there was a greater need for specialists who could put theory into practice. The ability to draw knowledge from strong scientific foundations continues to be paramount as students prepare for careers in exercise and sport.

Courses such as anatomy and physiology, exercise physiology, kinesiology, and other courses in the study of human movement have provided these scientific foundations. In addition, students began to need specialization in a specific aspect of exercise and sport such as cardiac rehabilitation and sports marketing (Nieman, 1990).

Due to the variety of academic programs available, in 1988 the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE), an association of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), developed specific academic standards for students preparing for careers in exercise and sport. These standards provide students "with entry level skills and knowledge to competently function in a wide range of fitness employment opportunities" (Arnold et al., 1988). In addition to the *Standards for Programs Preparing Undergraduate Students for Careers in Fitness*, NASPE has compiled a listing of academic programs in exercise and sport (Blanke & Rice, 1991).

Along with college- and university-based professional preparation programs, many professional organizations now provide exercise and sport credentialing opportunities (Nieman, 1990; Summerfield, 1991). Examples of such organizations are:

American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM)
Box 1440, Indianapolis, IN 46206-1440

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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES FOR TEACHER EDUCATION
One Dupont Circle • Suite 610 • Washington, DC 20036-1186

American Council on Exercise (ACE, formerly IDEA)
2431 Morena Boulevard, Suite 2-D, San Diego, CA 92110

Association for Fitness in Business (AFB)
965 Hope Street, Stamford, CT 06907

National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA)
1001 East 4th Street, Greenville, NC 27834

National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)
3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302

National Strength and Conditioning Association
P.O. Box 81410, Lincoln, NE 68501

Renewed Interest in Teacher Certification

As with most occupations, projections for physical education career opportunities are largely dependent upon future trends and national economic forecasts. The increase in nonteaching job opportunities coupled with a decrease in the number of available teaching positions has resulted in a movement away from the traditional physical education teaching major. This trend, in conjunction with cuts in physical education programs due to budget constraints, meant that large numbers of physical education teachers left teaching.

However, even though there is still a shift away from the traditional physical education major, it is important to note that students who have already earned a degree are beginning to return to school for teacher education certification. There appear to be three reasons. First, the nonteaching exercise and sport job market has become so heavily saturated that job opportunities are not as plentiful today. Second, physical education teachers who have been teaching for 20 or 30 years are beginning to retire, and there will be a gradual increase in the number of physical education teaching positions available. And third, in some nonteaching careers there is no career ladder. There is potential for a shortage of physical educators as a result of the small pool of students being certified to teach physical education (Gerald & Hussar, 1990), although this shortage may be keener in specific geographic areas.

There are additional factors influencing the return to traditional teaching positions. In 1990 the Public Health Service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established 16 health and fitness objectives for the year 2000. One of the objectives is to "increase to at least 60% the proportion of people age 6 and older who participate in moderate physical activities . . . 3 or more days per week for 20 minutes or more per occasion" (Public Health Service, 1990). This may have a positive impact on the number of school systems requiring physical education. Because the largest growing segment of the American population is adults over the age of 65 (Public Health Service, 1990), there will be an ever increasing need to provide people with opportunities to exercise throughout the life span (Nieman, 1990).

Conclusion

The challenge for physical education professionals and those who prepare them is to provide the knowledge necessary to be at the forefront of change. Emphasis must be placed on continued study of present trends and forecasts and their relationship to physical activity careers. The public's pursuit of a healthy lifestyle through physical activity will be best served if exercise and sport professionals are leading, rather than reacting to, the latest trends. Examples of some present trends that may have an impact on curriculum development include: aging of the population, more at-risk children in the school system, increased use of computers. While emphasis has been placed on nontraditional physical education careers, it is also important to continue a focus on traditional teaching and coaching opportunities.

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